


vfridge – early social networking  
why did it fail?

background

1999 – dot.com era

existing start up aQtive  
– intelligent internet agent onCue



2000 dot.com crash!

... but spawned a spin-out!

the future of the web  
(in 1999)

dominant view:

- expecting ‘shake out’
- small number of large players
- future of web as TV-style broadcast medium

we thought differently ....

the websharer vision (1999)

“ The web/Internet is not just a medium for publishing, but a potential shared place.

Everyone may be a web sharer — not a publisher of formal public 'content', but personal or semi-private sharing of informal 'bits and pieces' with family, friends, local community and virtual communities ...”

- sounds prescient (web 2.0!)
- and was translated into a product (vfridge)
- so why didn't it work?

timeline of vfridge

1999 – first implementation – stand-alone Java app with bespoke server  
later first web version using applet

2000 – dot.com crash  
but seed funding for vfridge.com ☺

2002 – vfridge mothballed ☹

2010 – ‘facsimile’ version reproduced in PHP!

## demo

## technical barriers

- applets – write once run nowhere
- Java and SQL
- pre Ajax
  - but some clever tricks – image loads and frames
- cross browser
  - blood and tears

## market barriers

- downloads still very slow
- use of web still limited
  - esp. problematic for collaborative apps.
- dialup rather than ‘always on’ connections

## commercial pressures

need to demonstrate ROI

- ( return on investment )

=> divided focus:

- intranets, schools, homes

## vision

- big vision (websharer) great
- metaphor (fridge door) loved
  - but text version loved too!
- locked into surface appearance
  - forgot the big vision
- Facebook could have been produced on ‘99 web